

# INTRODUCTION

## What Is Household Hazardous Waste?

Many common household products contain hazardous substances. These products become household hazardous waste (HHW)

once the consumer no longer has any use for them. The average U.S. household generates more than 20 pounds of HHW per year. As much as 100 pounds can accumulate in the



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home, often remaining there until the residents move or do an extensive cleanout.

Hazardous waste is waste that can catch fire, react, or explode under certain circumstances, or that is corrosive or toxic. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set stringent requirements for the management of hazardous waste generated by industries. Some HHW can pose risks to people and the environment if it is not used, stored carefully, and disposed of properly. However, Congress chose not to regulate it because regulating every household is simply too impractical.

Government and industry are working to develop consumer products with fewer or no hazardous constituents. However, for some products, such as car batteries and

photographic chemicals, no "safe" substitutes exist. So, communities will need effective HHW management programs for some time to come.

## Communities Find Solutions

HHW programs can benefit communities in several important ways. They can reduce the risks to health and the environment resulting from improper storage and disposal of HHW. They can reduce communities' liability for the cleanup of contamination resulting from improper HHW disposal. Finally, HHW programs can increase community residents' awareness of the potential risks associated with HHW and promote a

### Common Household Hazardous Wastes

(These items, and others not included on this list, might contain materials that are ignitable, corrosive, reactive, or toxic.)

- **Drain openers**
- **Oven cleaners**
- **W and metal cleaners and polishers**
- **Automotive oil and fuel additives**
- **Grease and rust solvents**
- **Carburetor and fuel injection cleaners**
- **Air conditioning refrigerants**
- **Starter fluids**
- **Paint thinners**
- **Paint strippers and removers**
- **Adhesives**
- **Herbicides**
- **Insecticides**
- **Fungicides/wood preservatives**

Source: A Survey of Household Hazardous Wastes and Related Collection Programs, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA/530-86-038.

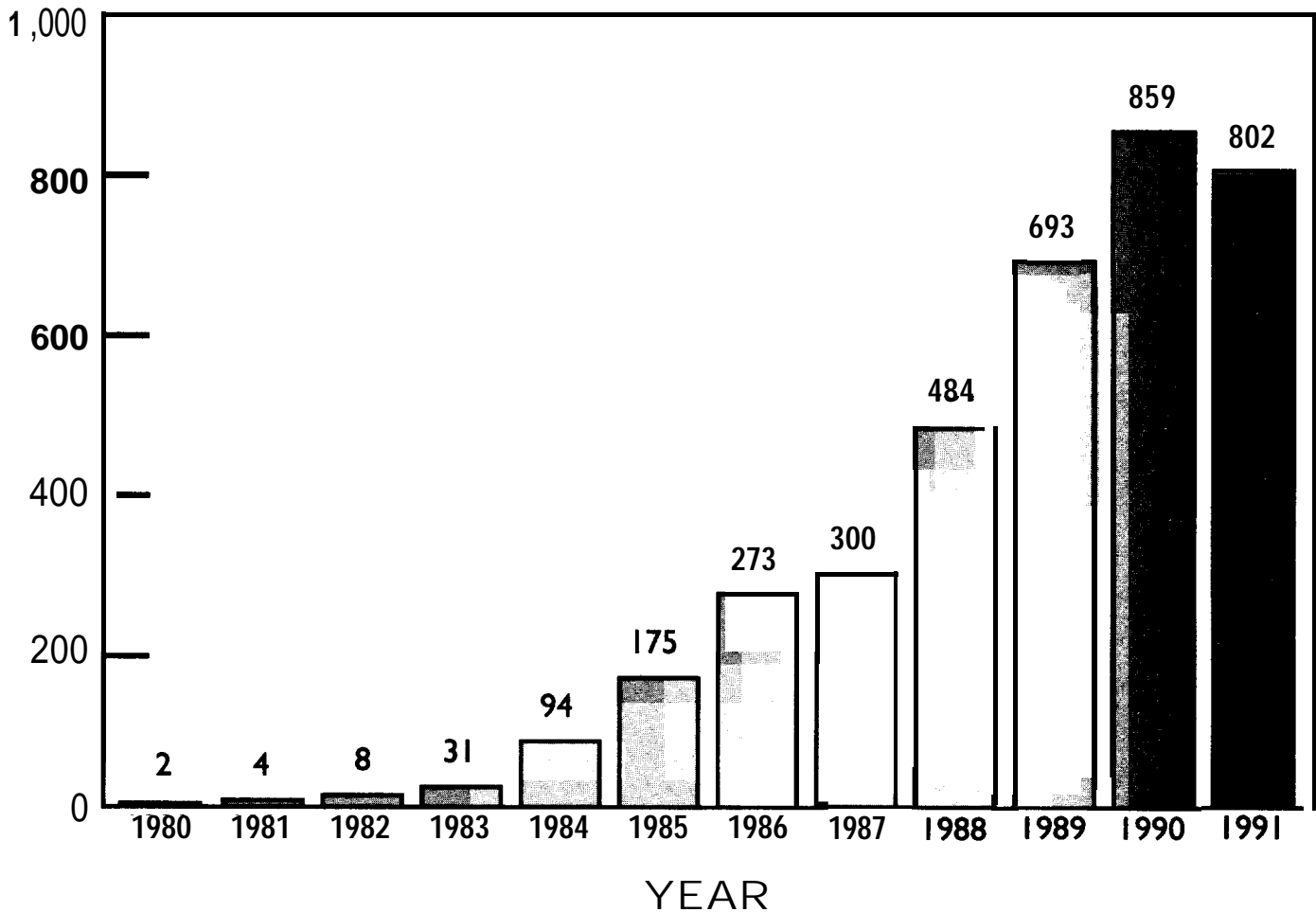
better understanding of waste issues in general.

Many communities have established programs to manage HHW. The impetus for starting a HHW program can come from the grassroots level, from local or state government agencies, from community groups, or from industry. The number of HHW collec-

tions in the United States has grown dramatically over the last decade. Since 1980, when the first HHW collection was held, more than 3,000 collection programs have been documented in all 50 states.

Although programs vary across the country, most include both educational and collection components. Communities usually

## PROGRAMS



Number of HHW Collection Programs in the United States, 1980-1991.

Source: Waste Watch Center, Andover, Massachusetts, 1991.

## N T R O D U C T I O N

begin a HHW program by holding a single-day drop-off HHW collection. Organizing a collection event is an important first step in reducing and managing risks associated with HHW.

Some communities hold annual or semi-annual collections, while others have established permanent HHW collection programs with a dedicated facility (open at least once each month) to provide households with year-round access to information and repositories for HHW. By 1991, 96 permanent HHW collection programs were operating in

16 states. In addition, communities have initiated pilot programs for curbside pick-up by appointment, neighborhood curbside collection programs, and drop-off programs for specific types of HHW.

The efforts of communities across the country provide a wealth of experience for other communities beginning HHW management programs. As the number of these programs continues to grow, public awareness about HHW will also grow, and the environmental problems associated with improper storage and disposal of HHW are likely to decrease.